

[By Jenna Pizzi](#)

Rep. Peter Welch carefully backed a new Mitsubishi electric car into a parking spot at City Market in downtown Burlington on Thursday morning.

The compact car, a Mitsubishi Innovative Electric Vehicle, has a battery with a 62-mile driving range. Welch said he hopes to see a lot more electric vehicles like the Mitsubishi on the road to help decrease reliance on foreign fuel sources.

Almost all of the greenhouse gases emitted in Vermont are caused by transportation, said Brian Searles, the state transportation secretary, who was on hand Thursday to meet Welch as he parked the MIEV.

"Fossil fuels are not renewable," said Searles, who said that to meet the state's goal of using 90 percent renewable energy by the year 2050, it is time for some big changes. "Electrification of the fleet is important."

The "fleet" is the cars that Vermonters are driving all over the state, although Searles said the Transportation Agency is looking into adopting electric vehicles for some uses.

Three new MIEV vehicles, with a sticker price of \$35,065, rolled off the truck and onto the lot at Burlington Mitsubishi on Thursday, said Paul Beaudry, a manager at the dealership in charge of electric vehicles. Beaudry, who ran against Welch in the 2010 election, joined the congressman in the Mitsubishi for the drive to the news conference Thursday.

With the price of gas in Vermont creeping up around \$4 a gallon, more people may be looking to switch to electric vehicles, Welch said.

Welch is hoping that federal funding will encourage them. He has co-sponsored the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act, which would provide states with funding specifically to invest in electric car charging stations.

"The price of gas in the long run is going to keep going up," Welch said. "We have so much excess electricity in the country that we could provide the fuel for this fleet."

The legislation would be part of the national transportation bill, but it faces a long road to passage in the House of Representatives. The House, which Welch characterized as a "spectacle of dysfunction," has had difficulty passing legislation this year with the election cycle looming.

Almost identical legislation recently passed the Senate. Even if the act sponsored by Welch does not pass, he said, some funding for electric vehicle charging stations will likely be included in any transportation bill passed by both houses.

"We have got work to do, but it is a beginning," Welch said.

The funding would help the state propel Project Get Ready, facilitated by the Vermont Energy Investment Corp., to encourage drivers to switch to electric vehicles while rolling out electric vehicle charging stations and making sure Vermont's electric grid is equipped to handle the electricity required to charge the vehicles.

Chris Burns, director of energy services for the Burlington Electric Department, said that while the electric grid can handle the small number of electric vehicle being charged now, it will take preparation to make sure that if the number rapidly increases, there is enough electricity to power them.

Many of the state's 12 electric vehicle charging stations, which include one outside City Hall in Montpelier and another in Rutland, are currently free to electric car drivers, but in the event that there are a large number of electric vehicles, the owners of those stations will have to decide whether to charge drivers a fee to charge their vehicles, Burns said.

Burns added that if the station is at a store, the minimal cost of electricity may be offset by the money a driver would spend inside the store.